

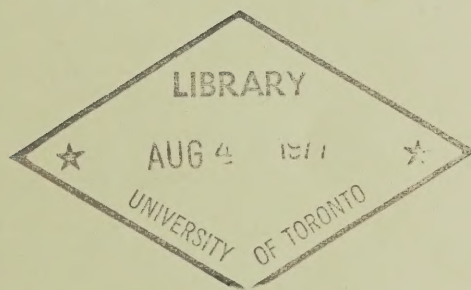
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Papers on the Portuguese Community



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PAPERS ON THE PORTUGUESE COMMUNITY

	Page
Report on the Portuguese Seminar	1
Conflicts and adjustments of Portuguese youth in school, home, and community, by Ana Maria Coelho	7
The adjustment problems of the Portuguese mother, by Fatima Pires	15
Publications available from Multicultural Development Branch	18



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Report on

THE PORTUGUESE SEMINAR

held at St. Helen's Portuguese Community Centre

November 21, 1973

The seminar was jointly sponsored by St. Helen's Portuguese Community Centre and the Ontario Citizenship Branch (now the Multicultural Development Branch). Much of the staff work was assumed by St. Helen's Portuguese Community Centre. Reverend E.F. Boehler of St. Helen's Church acted as chairman of the seminar.

Program

There were four addresses, the subjects of which were:

- a) The Portuguese Family
- b) Adjustment Problems of the Portuguese
- c) The Portuguese School System
- d) The Portuguese Mother

Content

The content of the addresses and the group discussions is summarized briefly below:

The Portuguese Family: (This includes discussion on the Portuguese mother.)

Discussion tended to centre on Portuguese immigrants from rural areas, who comprise a large proportion of those coming to Canada. The city-bred Portuguese experience much less difficulty.

These Portuguese from a rural society have little education or occupational training and engage in unskilled work, often heavy manual labour. On arrival in Canada they have to cope with a different climate, a different life style, different habits and customs and living in a large modern city.

Most of them were accustomed to living in their own homes. In Toronto, at first they live in apartments or flats and the mother finds it restrictive because she must keep the children quiet. Because of their large families, the Portuguese find it almost impossible to rent apartments and are soon forced to buy a house. Mothers and older children must go out to work to pay the mortgage. In the evenings mothers must do their domestic work and find it hard to hold their families together as they did in Portugal.

Most families are brought here by relatives, and settle near them, so there are neighbourhoods composed almost wholly of Portuguese. Children learn the new language and adjust quickly but parents do not. They are too busy and too tired to go to night school to learn English. They try to preserve the values of the old country against change.

The generation gap is very wide. In Portugal, boys and girls did not go to parties or movies, or go out in the evening with boyfriends or girlfriends. Courtship patterns are stringent. Dating is unknown. If a boy and girl are interested in each other, the boy may not be allowed to go to the girl's home for a couple of years. They are allowed to talk, the girl from the window and the boy outside. When both families agree to let the courtship continue, the boy may come to the home on days designated by the father and the boy can go out with the girl provided they are accompanied by a chaperone.

The father is head of the household. When teenagers begin to follow the practices of Canadians, both parents strongly disapprove, but the mother often acts as a buffer between the children and the father.

Parents do not understand Canadian services such as the school system, immigration laws, workmen's compensation and unemployment insurance. Neighbourhood information centres are useful but immigrants do not always know of them and must be encouraged to use them.

Family breakdown is more common than in the old country. In recent years many men came to Canada as visitors and could not send for their families until they obtained landed immigrant status. Families become estranged through long separation. Mothers and fathers work at different hours and this separates the family. More day care centres are needed. Some friction occurs when working wives become more independent and want some say in spending the money they earn.

Portuguese have an aversion to government officials and to public meetings. They have not been accustomed to taking action in community matters.

Education:

Portuguese who came to Canada as adults likely went to school at a time when education was compulsory for only four years from the ages of seven to eleven. At that time, in rural areas, attendance was not strictly enforced. About ten years ago, attendance became compulsory for six years. During the past few years, more well-educated Portuguese have been coming here than formerly.

Like most other immigrant children, Portuguese suffer from a language handicap. There is a strong reaction among Portuguese to the idea that their children are "from the hills" and consequently have an innate inability to learn. They resent the fact that so many of their children are directed into vocational rather than academic courses.

More Portuguese children should be encouraged to enter the helping professions such as teaching, medicine and social work so they can help their fellow countrymen in their adjustment to Canadian life.

Girls are considered to be less in need of education than boys and are often taken out of school at sixteen to look after younger children.

Parents cannot read report cards and cannot talk to the teachers. They are shocked to find that sex education is taught in the school because this is a taboo subject at home or school in Portugal. Canadian schools have more teaching aids than Portuguese schools. Portuguese parents want their children to do well in the academic area and regard some activities such as field trips, TV programs and sports activities as time wasting.

Discipline is much stricter in Portuguese schools and homes than those in Canada and parents believe in using corporal punishment to a greater extent.

Parents feel that their children lose their Portuguese heritage and lack pride in their identity.

Adjustment Difficulties:

The adjustment difficulties are related to lack of education and occupational skills, differences in family patterns, the transition from rural to urban life, from a conservative to a freer and more open society.

Portuguese workers are not accustomed to frequent job changes. Being laid off and looking for employment over and over again they find very discouraging and this happens often to unskilled workers.

When seeking employment they are often rejected because they have no Canadian experience. If this experience is so badly needed there should be a training period after arrival, in the English language, together with some occupational skills.

Boys who had left school in Portugal and were out earning money may have to return to school here because they are under sixteen. They resent this, and sometimes their parents do too, because they had counted on their son's earnings to keep the family in the early days.

Because of their need for work and their ignorance of Canadian laws, Portuguese immigrants are easy prey to exploitation. They are often underpaid and work long hours without overtime pay.

They find the system of providing social services very complex. They are referred from one office to another in different parts of the city and are very diffident about talking to officials because of their language handicap and their ignorance of the services provided. They feel they are often treated in an unfriendly manner in government offices.

General Comments:

The publicity material given to prospective immigrants by immigration officials makes immigration to Canada a very attractive prospect. The Portuguese participants advocated that the Department of Manpower and Immigration should tell it as it is. The Department should try to attract more Portuguese professionals such as doctors and teachers and pay for their retraining here.

More interpreters are needed especially in service agencies and in hospitals. Hospital patients are disturbed when they get no explanation of their ailments.

The Ontario Educational Communications Authority has a responsibility to ensure that immigrants understand Canadian institutions such as schools, churches, banks, educational programs, employment and social services. This should be done by TV, radio, films and conferences.

The Portuguese people should be making their needs known to government, but they are not accustomed to organizing and acting as a group. Both state and church have been more paternalistic in Portugal than in Canada and have not encouraged this kind of action.

More studies are needed concerning the orientation of Portuguese.

Evaluation of the Seminar:

The seminar, judged by verbal comments and evaluation sheets turned in, was considered highly successful. There were some suggestions for improvement. Participants thought the format was good. Some felt there were too few Portuguese resource people and too few young people, a situation which is difficult to remedy if seminars are held in the middle of the week. Some would have preferred specialized workshops rather than general ones.

Attendance :

There were one hundred and thirty-seven registrations for the seminar. As with the Black seminar, applications had to be rejected because of space limitations. The break down is as follows:

Department of Manpower and Immigration	2
Department of the Secretary of State	3
Ontario Citizenship Branch	11
Ontario Human Rights Commission	1
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education	5
Ontario Probation and Parole Services	4
Ryerson Polytechnical Institute	3
Service for Working People	1
Workmen's Compensation Board	2
Metro Toronto Police Department	2
Metro Toronto Social Services	2
Metro Toronto Separate School Board	22
Toronto Board of Education	20
Toronto Public Health Department	2
Teachers of English as a Second Language	9
Clarke Institute of Psychiatry	2
Catholic Family Services	4
Family Service Association	4
Catholic Children's Aid Society	5
Metro Interfaith Immigration Committee	2
St. Helen's Community Centre	2
International Institute of Metro Toronto	1
St. Elizabeth Visiting Nurses	2
Victorian Order of Nurses	4
Toronto Western Hospital, Social Services	3
Student Nurse	1
Council of Catholic Charities	1
Catholic Social Action	1
Community Information Centre of Metropolitan Toronto	1
St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Church	1
St. Helen's Roman Catholic Church	4
St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church	1
Cross Cultural Communication Centre	1
Volunteer Bureau of Toronto	1
George Brown College	1
Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto	1
York University	2
Doctor	1
Lawyer	1
Accountant	1

CONFLICTS AND ADJUSTMENTS OF PORTUGUESE YOUTH IN SCHOOL, HOME, AND COMMUNITY

by Ana Maria Coelho

Since the early 60's Portuguese immigrants have left their humble surroundings to take up a new life in Canada. The decision to become an immigrant in a foreign land is not an easy one.

Immigration to, and migration within, a new country is more than mere physical change. Special problems of transition are faced by people who have moved from a rural class background of limited opportunity, low educational standards and authoritarian family, state and religious life.

The conflict of opposing traditions and ways of life is an especially difficult issue for many young people. Accustomed to highly structured family, church and social environments, they find themselves torn between contradictory demands of becoming Canadian or remaining Portuguese.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze some of the problems which young Portuguese people face in their confrontation with school, home and community.

Most of this paper will be with reference to the Portuguese community of Cambridge (Galt), Ontario.

The paper's format is as follows:

- I. Introduction - The introduction will give an account of the place of origin with some details of cultural background. This is essential in order that one may get a better insight into the constant struggle in the transitional efforts.
- II. Problems - This section will deal mostly with the problems that the young people encounter, and how they have adjusted to some of these conflicts.

Introduction

Portugal is a short story: a compact country with a variety in limited space; a country where a pre-industrial and pre-enlightened civilization is still intermittently functioning.

The true economic miracles of Portuguese history really belonged to the age before the machine. It has made no real contribution to a post-industrial world.

Portugal is still a poor country. Most of the people work on the land and some samples of great engineering and building contrast strongly with the simple ways of peasants, who seem to be quite unspoiled and often still prefer to go about barefoot though they may be earning better money and have electricity in their cottages.

In short, Portugal has not escaped modern industrial civilization which often threatens to reduce the diversity of the forms of human life to a sad, monotonous uniformity.

Portugal has a low standard of living and a government which does not allow a popular share in administration.

Thousands of people each year leave their simple surroundings. They emigrate for a variety of reasons whose common denominator is a desperate determination to improve their economic situation, and most are lacking in skills and education. The total effects of these factors, coupled with a strong administration of the effects of North American material prosperity, has given the Portuguese group an intense determination to become part of a society which has produced material marvels. Their lack of familiarity with English and their difficulty in adjusting to the local social and cultural system slow down their integration and they necessarily maintain their ethnic culture in the meantime.

Adults are not the only ones who encounter difficulties in adjusting to the new surroundings. The children of these families who emigrate are often the victims of frustration and anxiety when it comes to adjustment. The hardest area of adjustment is often the school environment. Other problems may arise as a result of those initiating from the school. The following subject material will outline some of these conflicts which a youngster may encounter when placed in a strange educational environment. An analysis of related conflicts will also be presented.

In order that one may understand why a Portuguese child may not adapt to the Canadian school system, it would only be appropriate to give a brief description of the system in which he was reared.

In Portugal the elementary school course lasts six years. Children begin at the age of seven, and attend eight hours a day (8:00 - 12:00 noon and 1:00 - 5:00 p.m.) six days a week from the first of October until the end of June. There is no kindergarten in Portuguese schools. After elementary school they may choose from three streams of education in secondary school as Canadians do, the academic, commercial and technical. Secondary education is not free in Portugal.

Until recently, on both the mainland and the Azores, only members of the upper class could read and write fluently. Today, however, there is room for all in Portugal's public schools and just recently the minimum program for Portuguese children was expanded from four to six years.

As one may expect in an authoritarian country the school system is highly structured and discipline is strict. Comparatively few students go on to secondary school, particularly in the Azores where a student may have to travel far from home. Many boys seek full time employment at an early age. Once they have finished elementary school, girls are expected to help within the home environment. The high structure and discipline often creates a feeling of resentment towards the system, in many students.

The total educational system is controlled from Lisbon and unlike Canada, there is little or no provincial or local autonomy with respect to educational needs.

Problems

On arrival in Canada, most children are thrust into the school system at the first grade level with no age consideration. Often a child is

placed in a primary grade though academically and emotionally he might be above that grade level. Acquisition of language is the criterion for placement. *For example, when our family arrived in Canada in 1957, we were all placed in a separate school. My sister and I were placed in grade one. This was fine since we had no educational experience behind us. However, my brother, who was eleven and was in his last year of elementary school in the Azores was placed in grade two. He was totally discouraged with the whole thing. Here the kids were colouring, adding and subtracting. He was quite ahead of them. He already knew how to write, multiply and divide. The result was total disillusionment and boredom. He was often the victim of mischievous behaviour and was penalized for it. However he managed to struggle on. He was 21 when he graduated from high school. He is now thankful that he did continue, but he still recalls those days and often remarks how he felt like a shepherd with his herd of lambs around him. He made it, but many didn't.*

This means of placement has since been altered. Today a child coming in to the school is placed in a grade according to his age level. Very few who arrive after the age of 16 are registered in school. The exception is perhaps if they were in a higher mode of education at home; this being high school or trade school.

Language is still the largest drawback. Often schools are not equipped with teachers who can cope with these children.

Gradually, schools are recognizing the needs of these children and are experimenting with special programs. They are incorporating remedial reading classes and special English classes are held for Portuguese students twice a week. They are even considering conducting classes in Portuguese with English being introduced slowly. However, a lack of qualified staff is impeding the progress of this proposal. The answer may not be in this particular program, but the indication is that schools are making positive efforts to give these children equal opportunities to reach some goal in their lives.

The indication that immigrants are experiencing special learning difficulties is present. They are usually reading below their grade level and their language is also deficient. This is not through their own doing. Quite often the teacher does not recognize this and uses vocabulary too advanced for the child to comprehend. Difficult vocabulary, instruction

which is too fast-paced and previously acquired subject matter is often what the child is forced to cope with. As a result his simplest solution is to give up.

Another major problem concerning immigrant children is discipline. Their realization of lax classroom control often creates problems for the teacher. The teacher is often not prepared for the problems which may occur as a result. The child finds himself freed from the highly structured, strict classroom atmosphere. He then proceeds to test this freedom. Often in this experimentation the child becomes almost totally unmanageable. As a result of the child's behaviour and/or the teacher's experience, he is isolated from class activities and his peers. He rebels once more and the teacher may never regain his confidence. At this point parents must be contacted and an interpreter explains the situation. The problem then becomes the parents' responsibility. The child often fears his parents and will then co-operate with the teacher.

Most Portuguese parents have spent less than four years in school. Yet, although their outlook on life is traditional, most want to give their children the benefit of a future in a new land. What they often fail to realize is that their children's future may include assimilation to the Canadian way of life and a disregard for Portuguese tradition. The problem of transition is essentially twofold: a change from rural to urban and the conflict between two cultures.

Consequently, the problem faced by the school is not only second language learning, but a social and psychological problem. It is suggested that the teaching of English may inhibit proficiency in the native tongue, and that the student may then be in conflict with what is occurring within his home and community.

The Portuguese concept of the family, with its reciprocal rights and obligations, has been transplanted here. Proud and sensitive, the Portuguese are also resourceful. Their strong family is the spur that makes them self-supporting. The newcomers find it hard to understand the airy dismissal of family commitments by some Canadians.¹

This often presents a problem for the child as he grows up and becomes aware of his shelteredness from the outside world. He recognizes his self-commitments to the family. His total world revolves around two

¹ The Globe Magazine, April 1960

centres, home and school. He begins to regret this commitment to the family. He yearns for independence and self-identity. This often is the basis for a family split. The family does not identify with this and sees the child as being disrespectful to his family. He is quite often shunned not only by his family but by other Portuguese citizens of the community. It can almost be compared to the same reaction as Neil describes in his book Summerhill. Upon arrival the children encounter a freedom which they have never possessed. Although there is no authoritarian figure, the child's behaviour can parallel. He exploits every bit of freedom, but with time he becomes bored with his new freedom. He then proceeds to take part in the activities made available to him. As in Summerhill (the school), the immigrant child finally comes to grips with himself. He has explored this freedom and begins to co-operate with the teacher and his peers.

Today Galt school officials are particularly concerned about the drop-out problems among Portuguese children. There are many requests for work permits for children between the ages of 14 and 16. Often the child is quite anxious to remain in school. The main reason is that parents feel that the children should supplement the family's income. Children, to the Portuguese, are part of the family working unit and income. They usually are expected to turn over their complete pay cheque until they plan to marry. The tragedy of it all is that some of these children are very ambitious and talented. Many are university material but their whole future is risked because of family selfishness, not necessarily financial need. The father would much rather have a large figure in his bankbook and materialistic wealth, than scholarly children.

There is no definite solution to this problem. Consultation has been the main method of trying to overcome it. But it often proves to be unsuccessful.

One writer expresses this issue by stating:

*Growing children are in full revolt against customs, sometimes with tragic consequences. Parents see only disgrace and shame in the new freedom of the new land. Daughters are accused of promiscuity and often beaten senseless, often resulting in families splitting.*²

² Correll, the Toronto Daily Star, June 7, 1969

Often the parents feel that their children are picking up ideas from Canadian schoolmates. For example, the girls may want to attend parties to which both boys and girls would be invited. The Portuguese girl would be denied permission to attend. The parents are determined that they should uphold traditional customs.

Portuguese tradition centres around the double standard in most aspects of life. *The double standard for the sexes is much more pronounced than in Canada. Women go out to work as they have not done before, but otherwise their lives are still very sheltered. A respectable woman does not go out in the evening unless accompanied by a family member. Young men have much more freedom than young women. There is no dating...courtship is carried on under the eyes of parents...parental consent to marriage is essential.*³ The child does not always accept this double standard and again family conflict arises.

Children are highly valued in the Portuguese home. The child's loyalties are first to the home, and then to school, work and community. As previously mentioned, the child is often removed from school to assist the family financially. Also the child is often called upon to interpret for the parents. Parents take children with them to clinics, on shopping expeditions, to business and government offices. As a result the child often misses many days of school in order to accompany their parents.

At home a large responsibility is given to the girl. Quite often the mother is working and the girl is expected to do the housework for the whole family and care for siblings, which often interferes with homework. Also, provision is not made for the child to do his homework and he has to resort to the kitchen table with no privacy to concentrate on his studies.

One common conflict between the old and new cultures is often the cause of discord in the family. Children become better educated than their parents and can move freely and comfortably in the new community. They adopt the dress, customs and habits of the new country and often the parents, who prefer the old ways, feel that their children are becoming strangers to them. They exert pressures on their children to make them maintain Portuguese traditions and to mingle socially with their own group. Consequently children become rebellious, discard parental controls and standards of conduct.

³ Ferguson, *Newcomers in Transition*, Toronto International Institute, 1967, p. 49.

The teacher who works with immigrant youth must be continuously made aware of the barriers and communication gaps which reinforce conflicts in the school and home. The troubles faced by the newcomer and his family must be understood if effective assistance is to be offered. An understanding of the ways in which his background differs from the Canadian mode is the essential starting point for such an awareness.

Many of the conflicts discussed in this paper have some hope of being resolved. Others will continue to exist for many decades to come. The young immigrant must cope with them or revolt against them in order that he may find his own peace of mind. As one who has been put through the grind mill, I can honestly say that I cannot deduce any magic solution. As with every other issue in this world there must be a compromise somewhere to eliminate some of the conflicts.

But there is a spark of hope, for culture is not a static entity. It is in a state of perpetual change. No matter how diligently a human group may seek lands which are precisely the same as those from which it came, success can only be partial. No piece of land is exactly the same as a second, any more than one man is the exact duplicate of another. Migrants make adjustments in their new environments, and in so doing create new values and attributes.

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December 19, 1973.

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THE ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS OF THE PORTUGUESE MOTHER

by Fatima Pires

As Mr. Pessoa explained this morning, most Portuguese immigrants come from a rural area of Portugal or the Azores. Coming to Canada is a great experience, especially for the mothers, whose scope of life is usually just her family and her home.

You can see the drastic change that awaits her in Canada. She has to adjust to a completely new way of life, a city life which she never knew.

One of the first adjustments she has to make is not living in a place of her own. In Portugal she had a house, and no matter how small or how poor it was, it was hers. Now, at least for the first few years, she has to live in a flat. This can be quite an experience. They're on the look-out almost 24 hours a day, seeing that their children don't make too much noise so as not to disturb the owners of the house. I know of some mothers who have been almost on the verge of a nervous breakdown because of this.

Since their main objective when they get here is paying off their debts, if they have any, and owning a place of their own, the mother is practically forced to go to work. It's mostly cleaning or factory work. (Even if they have a trade or a degree, they can't find work in their area of specialization because of the language problem.) It's quite a change from Portugal because most mothers don't go out to work there.

Another drastic change is that in Portugal the family was the centre of her world. She had time to hold it together. Here in Canada she doesn't have very much time to dedicate to her children. When she gets home, tired from work, she has to cook dinner, clean the house, and do the laundry. That doesn't leave much time for her children.

As the children learn English and get on in school, she cannot follow their progress. For one thing, she doesn't know English and can't read or understand their reports or talk to their teachers. She has no idea of the program in school, no idea of the method used. To a lot of them school is a place where they learn "bad things". It's at school that they learn sex education and (according to the mothers) where they learn to practise it. This is not too hard to understand when you stop to consider that this subject is never talked about in the home. Sometimes I wonder how they have so many children.

Most of the mother's problems fall into the category of parent/child relationship. I can say that the generation gap among the Portuguese is very wide. Most parents are still living 20 or 50 years ago in their small village. They have not adapted themselves to this new way of life. Most of their children are or feel like Canadians. There's a clash then in culture: the parents wanting their children to remain Portuguese and the children trying to break away.

It's very hard for the mother to understand or to accept many Canadian ideas, like dating, for instance, or going out at night. It's unthinkable, a girl going out with her boyfriend without a chaperone. It's just not done.

Another thing, both the families of the girl and the boy have to agree with the courtship. In Portugal, for the first couple of years after the boy meets the girl and they decide to go steady, the boy is not allowed to go out with the girl, not even to go into the house. They talk, the girl from the window and the boy outside on the street. They're lucky if the girl is allowed to use a window on the first floor. If not, she has to use a window on the second floor.

Only after they go on like this for a while and both families agree, will he then come in the house and ask for the hand of the girl and officially start their engagement. Now he may come in the house on the days designated by the father and they can even go out - with a chaperone, of course!

You can see that this just isn't done here. The children feel the same way. When they try to do as they see here, that's when war starts.

The mother is usually the one who suffers most because she's caught between her husband and her children. She covers up for her daughters, even though she may be completely against her ideas and her attitudes. But in order to keep peace in the home, she has to lie to her husband because she knows what the circumstances would be if he found out his daughters were going out with boys. So the mother acts as a buffer.

The mother has no source of entertainment but TV. At least now there are some Portuguese programmes on TV she can watch.

You can see that most of the mother's problems exist because she doesn't speak English and she holds on to her culture and traditions and doesn't very easily let go. How can we solve these problems? Maybe you have suggestions, which we can discuss in the workshops.

I know that there are many school principals here as well as other people working for the School Board. I would like to ask you if the Metropolitan School Board or the Separate School Board have done anything to widen the Portuguese mother's understanding of what's going on in the schools.

I would like to ask all of you who come in contact with Portuguese mothers in your daily lives to be patient and try to keep in mind that she wants to understand, but in order to understand, she has to be understood.

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